

## **Nelson Rohlilahla Mandela**

Nelson Mandela has been hailed as “the greatest and most courageous leader of our generation<sup>1</sup>”. In a life of personal sacrifice, he dedicated himself to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, an era which came to end with the country’s first multi-racial elections on 27 April 1994.

The African National Congress won the election and, as head of the party, Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as South Africa’s first black President on 10 May 1994. He went on to form a Government of National Unity, before stepping down after one term of office in 1999.

### **Rise to power**

Nelson Mandela was born in the Transkei, South Africa on 18 July 1918. His father, Henry Mgadla Mandela, was chief counsellor to Thembuland’s acting paramount chief, David Dalindyebo. Upon Henry Mandela’s death in 1927, the young Nelson became the chief’s ward, and was groomed as a future leader.

Mr. Mandela was educated at Wesleyan secondary school, Healdtown before attending University College of Fort Hare in pursuit of his Bachelor of Arts degree. Upon completing his BA, he began studying law in 1942. It was whilst studying that Mr. Mandela made his first forays into politics, joining the African National Congress in 1943.

In 1944, Mr. Mandela was one of the group of young ANC members who banded together under the leadership of Anton Lembede to form the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), which strove to change the ANC into a mass movement with a more radical agenda grounded in the principles of self-determination. By 1948, Mr. Mandela had been elected National Secretary of the League. In response to the victory of the National Party in the all-white elections of 1948, the ANC adopted the Programme of Action, based on ANCYL policies, which advocated the use of boycotts, strikes, civil disobedience and non-cooperation.

During the 1950s, Mr. Mandela fought hard for the freedom of his people, organising resistance to the Western Areas removals and campaigns of civil disobedience, as well as opening South Africa’s first black law-firm in Johannesburg with his friend and colleague, Oliver R Tambo. During the latter half of the decade Mr. Mandela, along with 155 others, was tried for treason. He was acquitted in 1961 after the court found that Mr. Mandela had not advised his followers to use violence, but had counselled peaceful means of resistance.

After the ANC was banned in 1960, Mandela went into hiding and worked with other leading figures within the liberation movement to create *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK), a militant wing of the movement, to provide armed resistance to the government. Later, at the Rivonia Trial, Mr. Mandela commented that, “it would be wrong and unrealistic for African leaders to continue preaching peace and non-violence at a time when the government met our peaceful demands with force. It was only when all else had failed, when all channels of peaceful protest had been

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<sup>1</sup> Quote from Prime Minister Gordon Brown speaking at the unveiling of the Nelson Mandela Statue in London, August 2007.

barred to us, that the decision was made to embark on violent forms of political struggle... the Government had left us no other choice."<sup>2</sup>

In 1962, Mr. Mandela was arrested, charged with illegal exit from the country and incitement to strike, and sentenced to five years' imprisonment with hard labour. Whilst serving his sentence, several fellow leaders of the ANC and MK were arrested and brought to trial for plotting to overthrow the government by violence, and Mr. Mandela was brought from prison to face the new charges. Of those tried, eight, including Mr. Mandela, were found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment on 12 June 1964.

Mr. Mandela began his sentence in the notorious Robben island prison camp where prisoners were forced into a brutal regime of hard labour. He was to remain on the island for the next 18 years. Incarceration failed to erode Mr. Mandela's influence within South Africa, and his imprisonment became a symbol of the iniquities of apartheid while acting as a rallying point for the campaign against the system both inside and outside South Africa.

During his time in prison, Mr. Mandela turned down numerous offers of freedom in return for accepting political compromises that fell short of fully dismantling the system of apartheid. He did, however, seek to find a political route forward, initiating a dialogue with the government in 1985 which led to 'talks about talks'<sup>3</sup>. Mr. Mandela maintained that negotiations could only be undertaken by the full ANC leadership.

On 11 February 1990, after 27 years in prison, Mr. Mandela was released from prison. Upon his release, Mr. Mandela strove to complete the work he had begun almost five decades before. In 1991 he was elected President of the ANC at the first national conference to be held in South Africa since the party was banned in 1960. Two years later Mr. Mandela was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize with the South African President, F W de Klerk.

On 27 April 1994, South Africa witnessed the official end of apartheid when the ANC won a 62.65% majority in the national elections. Mandela was inaugurated on 10 May 1994 as, "the first President of a united, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist government."<sup>4</sup> During his tenure in office, President Mandela oversaw the transition from minority rule, gaining international respect for his pursuit of national reconciliation.

In 1999, after one term, President Mandela announced his retirement from politics.

### **Life after office**

Mr. Mandela has worked tirelessly since his retirement to promote equality, democracy and development around the world. He has established three foundations to pursue these goals, *The Nelson Mandela Foundation*, *The Nelson Mandela Children's Fund* and *The Mandela-Rhodes Foundation*. He is also active within the *Foundation for Community Development* in Mozambique, a charity established by his wife, Graça Machel. In 2007, Mr. Mandela was made an Honourary Laureate of the *Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership*. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation gave grants to these four organisations.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/memory/views/biography>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> From President Mandela's inaugural address, [http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~wldciv/world\\_civ\\_reader/world\\_civ\\_reader\\_2/mandela.html](http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~wldciv/world_civ_reader/world_civ_reader_2/mandela.html)

Mr. Mandela also supports numerous charitable organisations and initiatives such as *SOS Children's Villages* and *Make Poverty History*. He is a notable champion of the fight against HIV/AIDS, spearheading *46664*, a fundraising campaign named after Mr. Mandela's prison number.

In 2007, Mandela, along with Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Graça Machel, announced the formation of *The Elders*, a council of world leaders designed to lend wisdom and leadership to problems and conflicts around the globe.

Nelson Mandela marked his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2008 and continues to stand as an inspiration to people throughout South Africa, the African continent, and the world.

#### **Key Dates**

D.O.B.	18 July, 1918 (The Transkei, South Africa)
1943	Joined the African Nation Congress
1944	Founding member of the ANC's Youth League
1952	Established South Africa's first black law firm with Oliver Tambo
1961	Helped Establish <i>Umkhonto we Sizwe</i> (MK)
1962-1990	Imprisoned on Robben Island, Pollsmoor Prison and Victor Verster Prison
1990	Released from prison
1993	Receives the Nobel Peace Prize, along with F W de Klerk
1994-1999	Elected and serves as South Africa's President
1995	Whilst in office, founded the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund
1999	Founding of The Nelson Mandela Foundation
2003	Founding of The Mandela-Rhodes Foundation
2007	Founding of The Elders